Michelle Massey

The distinctive smell of her breath spoken very close to my face immediately after waking - even more so of a striking memory because I did not sleep with this woman, who was my age and married to a guy with my middle name as his first, but her older sister, in different houses, of course. Still, on at least three occasions for some reason or another I was the first person she opened her mouth towards after slumber lasting a full six to eight hours.

She was the closest thing I had to a friend besides her sister in the entire city and time I spent in it. A very tiny thing sharing the same attributes that the mystery fantasy feminine companion of my prepubescent youth onward comprised: height which would have required her to look upward sharply while kissing and would place her head at my shoulder when laying curled around one another, long dark hair, dark eyes, a build described as petite even for the height measurement. I am not one to wander from my chosen partner until that relationship has come to an end of some sort. Moving human-shaped objects in my view all get classified as the same endlessly generated video game target after focusing on an affectionate interest. Which is why, 25 years later and several after the death of my former girlfriend and her only sister, the fact that I can still bring into a state from recall several distinct and richly detailed scenes involving multiple senses' (the best way to ensure you remember something) information input of experiences shared with her is surprising to me. That was not the plan. People and events I made an effort to never forget are either gone or might as well be, because the roads that were supposed to lead to them didn't get maintenance funding and are washed out overgrown trails through kudzu.

Michelle, her husband, and two sons lived in a historic part of Fredericksburg, a neighborhood consisting of houses nestled close to the few main thoroughfares of which the entire city had grown around. Tourism had been an obvious goal in city planning in decades prior to our arrival. There isn't a major cultural center any closer than San Antonio for quite a long distance, except maybe Austin. Travel any other direction and you are also moving backwards in time centuries. For further

clarification, when we (Tammy Massey and I) moved there George W. Bush's presidential library had just opened. If you can imagine living in the same small city in the middle of a lot of nothing that actively campaigned to receive such a bestowment, then indeed you have suffered here in hell.

Tammy spent a short time as a florist's assistant when we arrived, which prompted her to ask me what my favorite flower was. There was an exemption built into the question that forbid exotic, custom designed orchids and the like. My response was a plant that is not available at stores - the dandelion. For years my friend who attended culinary academy argued that dandelion wine was an urban legend. I have since found a cookbook of recipes written by a Scotsman that includes a section almost comprehensive on the subject. While containing anecdotes about the correct part of the life cycle to harvest and a description that is rather deterring to any who may want to use the provided formula - bitter, like duh, that's what you get for using weeds to make wine - it is a bit blurry on some details. It calls for liters of fluff. That is not how one measures a solid. But okay. Fill the container to the line. Right. Fluff is fluffy. Do we tamp it down? How much? Are you sure we shouldn't weigh this?

This is a moot point and the author was aware of this. Nobody wants to make dandelion wine unless they want to give it to someone who claims it doesn't exist along with a Shroud of Turin twin mattress sized sheet set (extremely high thread count of course). Only the white, fluffy, sexual part of the plant is used. Whether you're weighing it or just throwing it in a container, you're going to need more dandelions than you've ever seen in one place before - but not the stems or the roots, just the part that floats away when you walk up to them.

There was a playground at the edge of Michelle's neighborhood. While picking up her daughter from her house, Tammy noticed that there were dandelions covering it. Slamming on the brakes of her Toyota Corolla, the new one her insurance had

provided after our first date, we started picking them - not even close to enough to ferment and ingest - while Haley swang. When she wasn't drunk she was really quite a thoughtful and sentimental woman. Unfortunately for her body's needs, this was a rarity.

Michelle worked at a church's private school. Being that isolated from modern science has a profound effect on a population, one that is taken advantage of by predators. Tammy described Fredericksburg as rich white people and the poor Mexicans who worked for them. The entire city had a demographic category of one African American, who had been hired by a school online and was under contract, but almost certainly not known beforehand to be the case. Twenty-five years later nothing has changed.

One cold night right before the independently owned liquor store she favored was closing, Tammy, laughing, informed me that I had just held the door open for Sandra Bullock, who had been building a home in the area. She said it was hilarious. A movie star wearing aviator style sunglasses far too late in the day trying not to be noticed and the only man locally who looked like a genuine rock star with long hair, a long beard, and black niobium rings in his tragi also wearing sunglasses far too late in the day doing what his target of chivalry was hoping for and not noticing her. She said when she exited before me she had scanned the small parking lot and saw the Corolla with its engine running a few spaces from the door. The word I got when I came out a few minutes later carrying a full paper bag into the freezing temperature was that I was apparently Hollywood approved, as the actress had surmised who the loud guy in the leather jacket belonged to and smiled a female-to-female approval before looking back through the glass door and departing herself.

Michelle wore a matching biker style leather jacket in frigid temperatures, something made more distinctive by the incongruity of the visual effect with that of her public persona. On more than one holiday occasion she completed the

ensemble with extremely form-fitting black leather pants. Sitting on my lap and smearing my face with tequila, Tammy asked what I was doing at one such gathering. Always the one to be honest, I had replied, "Staring at your sister's ass."

"Yeah?"

"Uh-huh. She's not wearing panties."

"Maybe they're the kind with just a string up the crack."

"Nah. There'd still be a line around the waist, like one of your garter belts. I've been extra helpful here in the kitchen, which has been instrumental in this Encyclopedia Brown mystery. Views uninterrupted from multiple angles and light sources have confirmed this insightful opinion to be true."

"Yeah?"

"Uh-huh."

"We were talking a few minutes ago outside while she was helping me find my cigarettes in the car. Out of nowhere she pops out with 'I've only had a guy (she said guy, so I assume not her husband at the time, which has been exchanged at least once in the time passing since) put his cock in my ass once. It was the strongest orgasm I've ever had!' Thought I'd come report this to you. Wasn't aware there was an important investigation and it was already closed. I guess it wasn't such a random comment after all!"

Several minutes after that, in the backseat of the Corolla in her parents' driveway, she looped a twisted sheet around my neck 'in case I called her by her sister's

name.'

Um. Yeah. I don't feel like writing much anymore. Uh. More later. Yeah....